

My Lover The Devil: Women and Sexuality as Depicted Through Trials and Documents from the 1400s to the 1700s throughout Europe

During the 1400s through the 1700s witchcraft was a topic within European society that was tremendously prevalent. Not only were documents being published that discussed witchcraft but trials were also taking place throughout the continent. Within both trials and documents the idea of sex and its connection to witchcraft, primarily the actions of women, was presented and discussed. Throughout all of these examples women are discussed as having a need for sex that is fulfilled by the doing actions of magic. The idea of women being more carnal and in need of sex is presented primarily through *The Malleus Maleficarum* and the *Treatise on Superstition and Witchcraft*. There are also examples that support the ideas from these two primary texts that will also be presented. There are also trial documentations that present confessions and charges either presented or brought against women during this same period that detail actions of a sexual nature. These are presented primarily through the trials of the Chelmsford Witches, Marie Cornu, Suzanne Gaudry, Jeanette Clerc, Gostanza, and Asmodea which all present women who confess to acts of witchcraft and also of sexual relations to gain this power. There are also examples of trials in which confessions reveal sexual impropriety when women are brought in on charges of witchcraft. These women, though, do not confess to having practiced witchcraft. By focusing on the presentation of sex within documents discussing witchcraft during this time, as well as confessions and charges in witchcraft trials, the idea that women were seen as more sexual is exemplified.

The first document that presents women and their need for sex acting as a motivation for practicing witchcraft appears *The Malleus Maleficarum* written by Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger in 1487. Kramer and Sprenger were inquisitors in upper Germany during this

time. Their document was spread throughout Europe and used as one of the primary reference works in widespread witchcraft trials. In more recent analysis of the document it has been said to be immensely misogynistic in the way in which Kramer and Sprenger present their views in regards to witches. Throughout their document the two male writers discuss how they feel women are more prone to take part in magic because they are unable to restrain themselves which leads them down a path of sex and witchcraft. The idea that women cannot restrain themselves is presented through the following quote, “A woman which know[s] no moderation in goodness or vice; and when they exceed the bounds of their condition they reach the greatest heights and the lowest depths of goodness and vice...when they are governed by an evil spirit, they indulge the worst possible vices” (Kors 181). In this passage it shows that the belief that women cannot control their actions on their own is what leads them to do deeds that are outside of the normal behaviors accepted in society. The *Malleus* exemplifies the idea that women cannot stop themselves from acting on their desires because they do not have the restraint that men do. Kramer and Sprenger continue in this vein by saying that even “a good woman [is] subject to carnal lust” (Kors 183). This depicts the idea that even women who are seen as good and do good actions are still unable to restrain themselves from falling into actions of lust which are impious. With this in mind, the following quote from the *Malleus* presents the idea that since women are not in control of themselves, the two writers, as well as those who agree with their ideas, find that “it is not surprising that they should come more under the spell of witchcraft” (Kors 184). As the document continues it defines three primary defects within all women that lead them to be swayed into acts of witchcraft and magic. The first of these is that women are less intelligent than men. The second, though, depicts the idea that the lusts of women motivate them to act improperly as it is one of “inordinate affections and passions [which] they search for, brood over, and inflict various vengeance, either by witchcraft, or by some other means” (Kors 186). The third defect that is presented echoes the second in that it focuses on how women have weak memories which cause them to not know how to discipline themselves. This entire section focuses on how women cannot control themselves due to these defects. The final point that discusses women and their lack of control states,

“To conclude. All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable” (Kors 188). This quote is what truly exemplifies the idea that women are incapable of controlling themselves and that, due to this, they cannot control their want for sex. The sexual desire discussed here is also presented throughout documents in other countries during this same time.

The work of the Franciscan friar, Martin de Castanega, depicts the views of the religious in Spain in regards to witchcraft and woman. In his *Tratado Muy Sotil y Bien Fudado* or *A Treatise on Superstition and Witchcraft*, Castanega depicts similar ideas to that of the German Inquisitors from The *Malleus Maleficarum* which shows that the ideas of women as being more carnal and desperate for sex than men pervaded the continent during this time period. The ideas of the friar are very similar to those ideas in the *Malleus* but his work focuses more upon why older women have a need to connect themselves with the devil. The first passage that alludes to the idea of sexuality and its connection to magic states that, “The devil also easily blinds and brings under his tutelage those who do not bridle their carnal appetites” (Darst 302). The treatise goes on to say that “there are more women than men consecrated and dedicated to the devil” which further maintains the ideas presented through the *Malleus* during roughly the same time period (Darst 304). In Castanega’s explanation of the type of women that join the devil exemplifies the idea that older women are those that are more often drawn in by the devil’s magical temptations. The Treatise depicts this in the following passage:

Most of the women are old and poor rather than rich and young, because after they become old the men don’t pay any attention to them. They therefore have recourse to the devil, who satisfies their appetites. This is especially the case if the women were inclined and given to vices of the flesh when they were young. The devil deceives this kind of old woman by promising to satisfy her appetites, and he actually keeps his word... (Darst 305).

As this idea maintains similar ideas to that of Kramer and Spranger, Castanega goes on to discuss another aspect of the female sex that relates to sexuality. The fourteenth section of the treatise focuses on female menstruation and that this aspect of a woman gives her

additional powers that men cannot ever have. During this period of time in which a woman is dispelling what Castanega refers to as “impurities” the idea is that she is expelling not merely physical things but also emotional impurities (Darst 309). The Treatise also focuses on the idea that “the most subtle impurities of the body come out through the eyes like rays, and the more subtle they are the more they penetrate and are most infectious” (Darst 309). The idea of women expelling evil energy through their eyes is further expanded upon by Castanega by relating this energy to older women who no longer menstruate. According to Castanega these older women, “then purge more impurities through the eyes...the look of such women is therefore more dangerous” (Darst 310). While his work focuses more on how older women are in more control of magic it still connects to the ideas of *The Malleus Maleficarum* in that it still asserts the idea that women and their lust for sexual gratification, as well as, their sex in general, motivates their want to connect with the devil.

Much like the two previously mentioned documents, there are three more documents which also assert the same ideas in at least minor ways. Johann Geiler von Kayserberg, who is described as being “one of the most prolific theologians and public preachers in pre-reformation Germany” by Alan Charles Kors in *Witchcraft in Europe 400-1700*, gave a sermon on witchcraft entitled *Der Emeis* in 1508 (Kors 236). His sermons were all compiled to give a detailed collection of his beliefs in regards to those charged with witchcraft. According to *Der Emeis*, Kayserberg states that the reason that there are more female witches than male witches is due to three primary reasons which are much like those presented by *The Malleus Maleficarum*. His differ slightly but they still convey that women cannot control themselves because of their “instability of spirit, because they are better understood by demons, and because of their talkativeness” (Kors 238). All of this again shows women lack a sense of control over themselves. Another German writer during this time who discusses witchcraft is the well known religious man, Martin Luther. Within the previously mentioned text there are excerpts of his ideas under the heading “The Two Kinds of Sorcery and the Reformation.” Within this section there are references made to witchcraft which echo the ideas of other men in Germany as well as the rest of Europe. Not only does he discuss the sexual nature of witchcraft but he also mentions the idea of power being contained within

menstrual blood. Luther states, “They have unions with incubi and succubi of the demons...I omit here mention of women’s menstrual blood, used to make philtres of insane sexual passion” (Kors 264). The idea that menstrual blood can assist in the making of sexual magic further supports the idea that women are more sexual than males in the eyes of the men during this period. The final document to be discussed was written by Johann Weyer in 1563. This document was originally written in Latin but would later be translated into German which shows its spread throughout Europe. The ideas presented by Weyer also depict the same ideas of the previous documents but the reason this is so interesting is that Weyer wrote against the belief in witches during this time. Though he feels that there is a myth that is being spread by devil to make people believe that there are witches he still presents ideas that exemplify the notion that women are more prone to being swayed by the devil. Weyer writes that the word to mean evil-doer that is used by those in positions of authority is in the female gender, “not because the law wishes men to be unpunished, but because the female sex, on account of its innate simplicity, is more frequently susceptible to the demon’s ambushes”(Kors 282). This idea again backs up the idea that women are more frequently tied to witchcraft than men due to their inability to control themselves.

To further exemplify the idea that women are more sexual than men and that as the reason behind their want to do magic, there is a need to focus on the trials themselves. The first example of these trials occurred in England in 1566. Again the records from this trial that will be used are from the document collection compiled by Charles Alan Kors and Edward Peters and are under the title, “The Confessions of the Chelmsford Witches.” This trial focuses on three women, Elizabeth Francis, Agnes Waterhouse, and mother Waterhouse. In her statement Elizabeth Francis states that while she did not have sexual relations with the devil that the devil told her that in order to have the husband that she wanted she must “consent unto that Francis in fornication” (Kors 305). By having sex with this man she would keep him as her husband forever more. The confession of Agnes Waterhouse, though, refers to having sex with the devil in order to gain his power and favor. According to her confession, Agnes Waterhouse wished to make a woman named Agnes Brown afraid of her which the devil was willing to do if she would make an offering to him.

While she initially tried to give him a rooster he insisted that she must give him something else. The document states that Agnes “asked him what he would have then, and he said he would have her body and soul, and so upon request and fear together she gave him her body and soul...and then he departed from her, and she said that she heard that he made the said Agnes Brown afraid” (Kors 306).

The Trial of Marie Cornu took place in France in 1611 but during the time of the trial this area was under the possession of the Spanish Netherlands. In the records that are translated of this trial Cornu is said to have confessed that she has been

in the presence of the said devil, which she has declared to have been her lover and named Belzebub, having given him her soul and suffered that he rebaptize her, giving her the name Malavisee, and that she gave him as a token some hair which she had taken and removed from her shameful parts (Kors 346).

This aspect of her confession depicts the idea of her having had sex with the devil while it does not directly say so. The reference to him being her lover and her token of pubic hair to him exemplifies this idea. As the document continues it goes on to say that Marie Cornu has also confessed to having attended Sabbaths with the devil where she “danced, assisted at table, and there adored the said Belzebub, prince of the devils, being in the form of a black and stinking he-goat, and of being placed on her knees and of having kissed his posterior” (Kors 347). As the kissing of the devil’s rear is a common practice at Sabbaths according to documents written during this time it is not unnatural that such a confession would occur. The use of it in the confession though does emphasize a sexual nature to the relationship between Marie Cornu and the devil. In order to show her reverence to the devil, it is necessary for her to kiss him and, though it is in an unconventional place, she is still showing him a sign of affection.

The third trial that exemplifies the idea of women as being seen as more carnal and that being their motivation behind taking part in magical actions with the devil is that of Suzanne Gaudry. This trial took place in France in 1652 and is immensely detailed in relationship to other trial documents of this period. This trial presents an interesting set of details in that there is a confession, a recantation, and a second confession. The details of

these aspects further exemplify that men during this period felt that women were more sexual. In her first confession to the court, when she is asked how long she has served the devil she is recorded to have said “that about twenty-five or twenty-six years ago she was his lover...also that he had his way with her two or three times only” (Kors 360). When she was questioned for a second time Suzanne Gandry was said to have answered a similar question by saying,

that it has been about twenty-five or twenty-six years, that her lover also then made her renounce God, Lent, and baptism, that he has known her carnally three or four times, and that he has given her satisfaction. And on the subject of his having asked her if she wasn't afraid of having his baby, says that she did not have that thought (Kors 361-62).

In both of these confessions the accused presents that she did meet with the devil and that he has made love to her. The fact that she confessed to this shows that it was a necessary part of a confession. Upon a third interrogation, Suzanne Gaudry insists that her previous confessions were lies and that she is not a witch. Following this she is then tortured, presumably by a male, and she returns to her previous confessions. When she is questioned again she is still on the rack and states that the devil came to her roughly twenty years ago. At the end of this final interrogation she refuses to state again that she is a witch. Regardless of this, she is inevitably sentenced to be hanged and then have her body burned. This entire trial proceeding details how crucial the idea of sex is to women taking part in magical activities with the devil. Throughout all of her interrogations, Suzanne Gaudry is constantly asked how long she has been with the devil and in each of these times she is asked for when this time began.

A fourth slightly less detailed trial is that of Jeanette Clerc who was tried in Calvinist Geneva in 1539. She was tried and killed in a two week period following the death of her neighbor's cow that had eaten an herb that Jeanette herself had cut earlier in the year. Following torture she confesses to having killed the cow through dark magic. Jeanette also states that to gain this power “she had given herself to a black devil,” and that at her initiation ceremony, “she had unnatural intercourse with the Devil, whose semen was ice-

cold” (Monter 56). The fact that her description of how she gained her power again shows a woman having sex with the devil gives further support to the idea that it was seen as necessary for this to be involved in a witchcraft confession. The fact that men were the ones in charge of most of these court proceedings again backs up the idea that men believed that women needed to have sexual intercourse more frequently than men during this time period. Much like with Gaudry’s trial and the three previously mentioned trials, there is a minor reference made to merely trials in general by an unnamed source who states,

these confessions come not from one court alone, but from many different ones- from Trier, Maximin, Paulin, Euren, Esch, St. Matthias, Pfalzel, Saarburg, and elsewhere; and the suspicion is increased by the fact that others accused by these same persons have been found guilty and have confessed-among them some of considerable respectability, except that partly through avarice, partly through unchastity and other devilish impulses, they have fallen into this wretchedness (Kors 313).

This passage reveals that throughout the continent of Europe there are indeed multiple confessions by a diverse assortment of people, but, in all of them, there is the issue of having done something that is unchaste. This again supports the idea of sex being integral to witchcraft actions.

Following the previous four trials the article “Asmodea: A Nun-Witch in Eighteenth-Century Tuscany” by Anne Jacobson Schutte presents two examples of Italian witches. The first example is that of Gostanza da Libbiano who was tried by the Inquisition in the fall of 1594. She was a sixty-year-old widow who was a midwife and practiced forms of healing and was denounced as a witch by her neighbors. When she was brought in, she was immediately sent to be tortured by the head inquisitor. During her torture she is frequently pressed for information and according to Schutte stated, “If you want me to tell lies, I’ll tell them” (Edwards 121). As her sessions with the torturer became more frequent, she began to give more and more details about her behavior as a witch. In later confessions Schutte states that Gostanza confessed, “The devil...was a much better sexual partner than her husband. Not only was he very handsome, well dressed, and lusty; he was a considerate lover who tenderly

caressed and kissed her, the favorite member of his harem” (Edwards 121). Not only does she confess to having sex with the devil and being his lover but she also insists that she was put through other sexual trauma. Prior to her confessions, in regards to having been the devil’s lover she also says that “she was abducted from her father’s country villa at the age of eight by a shepherd, who raped her and then forced her to marry him” (Edwards 121). By confessing to crimes of witchcraft but also to immense amounts of improper sex, Schutte argues that, Gostanza was trying to fulfill the requirements that she felt the torturer needed to hear within her confession in order to be released. In order to gain release, she drew upon her familiarity with witchcraft lore which meant discussing three primary acts referred to by Schutte as “sacrilegious acts required of the devil’s disciples, but above all the abundant food, drink, and good sex” (Edwards 121). The fact that Schutte feels it was necessary for there to be a reference made by Gostanza of sexual practices shows that it is truly necessary for women to confess to carnal acts with the devil.

The second example that appears within the article is that of the title witch, Asmodea, who was brought in to be questioned by a missionary after her fellow nuns in her convent began suffering from strange illnesses that could not be cured by either medical or church treatments. When she was brought in to be interrogated, Asmodea immediately confessed to having been brought to the devil when she was a eight years old and that at that moment she was made his wife and blessed with her new name of Asmodea. The devil had also told her that she should join the convent in Marradi and, to keep her from feeling as though she was constantly confined, the devil would take her on journeys to strange and exotic places. During on of these ventures Asmodea confessed, “She had herself transported to...Constantinople where she saw everything that was great and beautiful in those courts...She attracted the attention of the Grand Turk, joined his seraglio, became one of his concubines, and satisfied her insatiable and libidinous desires with him” (Edwards 124). Though in this confession she did not confess to sex with the devil, her confession did present in her taking part in immensely unchaste behavior with the devil supporting her in her endeavors. Other nuns at the convent gave their own accounts of their fellow nun’s behavior. Schutte writes that the other nuns “heard her saying ‘words of affection, as

between husband and wife' and other 'dirty things'" while Asmodea was by herself in her cell (Edwards 125). Later analysis of the accounts that discuss Asmodea, connected her to a woman named Maria Deodata Fabri who was possibly forced into being a nun upon the insistence of her father. It is also stated that, following her trial, she was raped by one of the men who was transferring her and became pregnant. This pregnancy caused for an immediate annulment of her vows, but, after that, no other information can be found to say what became of her. This analysis is what supports the final portion of Schutte's argument which asserts that Asmodea was using the ideas of sex that she confessed to in an attempt to feel like she was in control of her life. In order to do this, it seems that she was using ideas from legends of witchcraft that she had heard throughout her life which allowed her to feel things she could not feel in real life. Schutte states that her confessions and possible illusions were an attempt to obtain, "the emotional gratification of being cherished by an attractive and wealthy male, sexual satisfaction, and above all power" (Edwards 134). This need was created by her life as a nun which was meant to suppress her from having the feelings that men, during this time, felt were natural to female nature.

The idea of sex being tied to witchcraft trials is also presented through women who are brought in on charges of witchcraft but confess to sexual misconduct initially rather than the charges they were brought in on. The first two of these confessions took place in Corsier in 1606. A woman named Pernette Francois confessed to having two illegitimate children and a second woman by the name of Jenon Favre confessed to having been involved in an incestuous and adulterous relationship with her aunt's husband (Monter 96). Both of these women had been brought in after a man in the area had confessed that he had been brought to a Sabbath by three women. The two women confessed to these accusations while they also confessed to being involved in witchcraft practices. A third confession similar to the previous two took place in Franches-Montagnes in 1670. Jeanette Maillard, who was 72 during this time, was brought in on charges by another accused woman in this same area. Though she insisted she was not guilty, and though she was not tortured, she eventually began spontaneously confessing to crimes. She constantly denied having sex with the devil but did confess that she had committed adultery. She also confessed to having committed

acts of dark magic and that, combined with her other confessions, led to her being sentenced to death. In all of these cases the confessions were linked to acts of sexual misconduct though they were not with the devil himself.

The documents and trials during this time period support the idea that women were charged with witchcraft due to the belief that they were more carnal in their sexual nature throughout Europe. In the confessions of women brought in on charges of witchcraft, even when there is no confession of witchcraft there is still a confession of sexual misconduct. The men who were writing during this time, even those who question the validity of the existence of witches, still present the belief that women cannot control themselves and are, thus, more easily swayed by the devil to do improper things. The constant appearance of sexual confessions as well as the ideas presented by writers during the premodern period throughout Europe, shows that women are seen as more carnal than men during this period.

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